

MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

Parks and Open Space Committee Meeting June 13, 2013

FINAL MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Nona Dennis, Chair; Susan Stompe, Larry Minikes, Tom Boss, Bill Long, Ernie Stanton, Doug Wilson, Judy Teichman, Ron Miska (Marin County Parks), Mike Swezy (MMWD), and Sharon Farrell (Golden Gate Parks Conservancy).

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND AGENDA ADDITIONS: MCL Business-Environment Breakfast with Jamison Watts incoming Exec. Dir. of MALT, 7:30 – 9:00 a.m., June 14; Mt. Tam Jam, benefit for Mt. Tam State Park produced by T.C.C., June 22, 11 – 7:00.

MINUTES for May 9, 2012 – Approved

ACTION ITEMS: Response to Little Hoover Commission Report on State Parks: As a follow up to the May 9 discussion of this report (See Minutes), which presents recommendations to resolve the administrative and fiscal issues that have plagued the State's Department of Parks and Recreation, the Committee determined that MCL should write a letter with our own recommendations to the Parks Commission. The basic problem identified by the report is the inability of the state park system to sustain itself without predictable, dedicated revenues and modern, flexible business tools. The State Parks Department is convening an independent "Parks Forward Commission" that will be charged with designing and adopting over the next 12 to 18 months a long-term plan for a financially sustainable State Parks System. See <http://parksforward.com/about-us#sthash.tlu8uTsw.dpuf>

Susan presented an outline of the report's six key recommendations, and proposed the following comments, summarized below, which were approved by the committee:

- A. A major recommendation of the report is to identify which parks are of "statewide significance" and divest those that are of primarily local or regional interest. Criteria to make such determinations should not be limited to revenue-generating ability of parks; they should also include natural resource values, especially unique scenic, habitat, and/or cultural-historic resources. The process should allow for ample public input. The Department should also consider how the Parks originally came into being, and the long-term consequences of losing the state's assets or changing their character under an enterprise-based operating model.
- B. The report recommends that the state retain basic financial general fund responsibility for parks that remain in the system. MCL believes that this should also allow for separate dedicated funding (Evans SB 241, pending in the legislature) and flexibility to establish partnerships.
- C. MCL agrees that management changes are needed – e.g., more entrepreneurial skills and modern software – but that skills necessary to build revenues should not supersede skills to protect and interpret natural resources.

- D. Staffing should include people with generalist backgrounds, and not limit management positions and promotions to POST (Peace Officer Standards and Training) certified rangers.
- E. Performance measures, as recommended by the Report, should not be standardized – that is, should not be based on “one size fits all” expectations but rather recognize the unique management demands of individual parks due to their particular circumstances.
- F. At the June 13 meeting, the MCL committee added another recommendation: The six recommendations in the Report should be re-ordered, with #6 coming first: That is, developing the proposed operating model that calls for a variety of skill sets for management and flexibility in hiring should be the first task, and its potential effect on the current inventory of parks should be evaluated: how does management currently “work” in various parks, and what efficiencies and different skill sets might improve performance before “writing off” parks that should be divested. MCL recommends a staged process of review by the Parks Forward Commission.

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. Marin County Parks Measure A Budget: Ron Miska, Deputy General Manager, presented an overview of the Marin County Parks Budgets for FY 2013-2014, with a focus on the budget for the first year expenditures of Measure A funds, expected to be somewhat over \$10 million. Measure A funds will enhance the capability of the department to undertake projects and enhance services; funds will be tracked separately from other department budgets. Projects for Year 1 are based on directives contained in the Strategic Plan, in the Vegetation and Biodiversity and Road and Trail Management Plans, and on staff knowledge of needs. The emphasis is on maintenance, repair, and renovation of existing facilities, as well as on hiring fixed-term (9-year) staff – park planner, open space rangers, volunteer coordinator, resource ecologist, and maintenance personnel.

The 20 percent allocated to Farmland Preservation will go as matching grants to assist ranchers and farmers in establishing conservation easements; and the 15 percent allocated to City, Town, and Special District parks will be provided as individual project grants within the broad parameters of 74.4 percent of the expected \$1.5 million to cities and towns, and 26.6 percent to special districts. The BOS will approve the allocation process but not the individual projects. Year 2 is likely to differ considerably from the first year focus on maintenance and repair; the Department is already setting up a “Parking Lot” for project ideas. All budgeting materials can be found on the department’s website: www.marincountyparks.org.

2. MMWD “Friends of Mt. Tam Watershed” proposals: Mike Swezy, MMWD Watershed Manager, gave a brief update of the three options the District is considering for an affiliated non-profit: 1) Expand the current Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Fund; 2) Form a new 501c3 non-profit “Friends of Mt. Tam Watershed”; 3) Participate in a Watershed Collaborative under the umbrella of GG Parks Conservancy – i.e., a collaboration among the four land management agencies who hold land on Mt. Tamalpais. Mike and colleagues have held numerous small-group meetings with a variety of stakeholders, and will hold a workshop on June 19, 6:00 to 8:00, at Marin Art and Garden Center, to get feedback from the public.

3. MMWD Watershed Built Environment Assessment: Mike presented a photographic inventory of built structures on the watershed. This study will become part of a Master Plan to serve as a guide for management of facilities, as a basis for developing work plans and prioritizing capital projects, collaborating with other land managers, seeking funding sources, and for involving the public in projects as they are proposed. The study, which has been reviewed by the District Watershed Committee, will go the board at a future date. Mike reiterated that the District's guiding policy is to protect the natural resources and clean water in the watershed, and permit recreation if and where it is compatible.

The inventory addresses watershed facilities in four categories: 1) Visitor services – facilities, picnic grounds, etc., such as at Deer Park, West Point Inn (run by an affiliated non-profit), Marin Stables, etc. 2) Administration and Operations, such as the Sky Oaks headquarters, historic structures, fire lookout, telecommunication facilities; 3) Historical structures, such as the Log Cabin, other cabins; and 4) Habitat restoration opportunities at abandoned or used facilities, like the Air Force Station, Bull Frog Quarry, etc.

4. Updates on Marin State Parks operations: Ernie Stanton reported that the operating agreements for both Tomales Bay SP and Olompali State Historical Park will change to Donor Agreements and both Parks will be operated by State Parks personnel. He announced the Annual Meeting at China Camp, set for 11:00 a.m., June 16.
5. Bay Area Open Space Council, May 16: Nona reported briefly on the annual Bay Area Open Space Council at the Presidio. Keynote speaker was the new State Parks Director, Maj. General Anthony Jackson. The myriad benefits of public parklands and open space were represented by various speakers – habitats, health and recreation, rangeland, Native American cultural, economic, and others. Of particular interest are current studies to better understand how important ecosystem continuity is for wildlife species with large territories. Maps are being developed for particular species to show their wide-ranging habitat needs and where connections between public lands and open space need to be improved around the Bay.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Next meeting: Thursday, July 11, 3:00 – 5:00

Minutes by Nona Dennis